



Department of Justice

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
THURSDAY, JULY 20, 2000
TDD (202) 514-1888

EPA: (202) 564-4355
DOJ: (202) 514-2008

WILLAMETTE INDUSTRIES TO SPEND MORE THAN \$90 MILLION TO SETTLE CLEAN AIR ACT CASE

WASHINGTON – Willamette Industries will spend more than \$90 million to settle a major environmental suit alleging that it failed to control the amount of air pollution released from its wood product factories in four states, under an agreement reached today with the Justice Department and the EPA.

The settlement, filed in U.S. District Court in Portland, Oregon, requires the company to install state-of-the-art pollution controls at 13 facilities in Arkansas, Oregon, Louisiana and South Carolina. The company also must pay an \$11.2 million penalty -- the largest ever assessed for factory emissions of air pollution. The agreement also requires the Portland-based company to spend an additional \$8 million on environmental projects.

“This settlement will improve air quality for thousands of people who live around these factories,” said Attorney General Janet Reno. “Willamette must now take responsibility and curb its pollution, so these factories will not pose a health risk to our citizens.”

The settlement resolves allegations, contained in a complaint that was filed along with the agreement, that Willamette failed to install pollution controls, accurately report air emissions, and obtain air emissions permits for 13 of its facilities. As a result, thousands of tons of pollution were illegally released into the air. The facilities, which produce plywood and other building materials, are located in: Chester, S.C.; Emerson and Malvern Ark.; Dodson, Ruston, Zwolle, Lillie, and Simsboro, La.; and Albany, Bend, Eugene, Foster and Springfield, Ore.

“Today we are announcing the largest enforcement penalty ever taken against a single ‘smokestack’ company under the Clean Air Act,” said EPA Administrator Carol M. Browner. “When a company chooses to pollute the air, it is not just breaking the law, it is placing the health of our families at risk. The Clinton-Gore Administration has fought and will continue to fight to protect the health of our families – especially our children – from polluters.”

The settlement covers more facilities than any other case ever brought under the Clean Air Act provision designed to ensure that air quality does not deteriorate in areas that have previously been deemed to have clean air. Under the provision, companies in these designated areas must install air pollution controls before building new plants or modifying old ones.

The new pollution-control equipment required by today’s settlement, with an estimated cost of \$74 million, will prevent Willamette’s factories from releasing an estimated 27,000 tons of pollutants, resulting in significantly cleaner air in the surrounding communities.

The states of Louisiana, Arkansas, and South Carolina are joining the federal settlement, and they will share in the civil penalty that Willamette must pay. The states will be instrumental in carrying out the environmental improvement projects that Willamette will fund under the agreement.

Pollution of the type emitted from Willamette's facilities, known as volatile organic compounds, is a component of smog. This air pollution can lead to breathing problems, especially among children and the elderly, eye irritation, and reduced resistance to colds and other infections. It can also accelerate the aging of lung tissue.

The United States reached similar settlements with Georgia-Pacific in 1996 and Louisiana-Pacific in 1993 under a nationwide initiative to ensure that the entire wood products industry complies with the Clean Air Act.

###

00-411